

# SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS:

A Guide for School  
Administrators



**SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS'**  
ASSOCIATION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA (INC)

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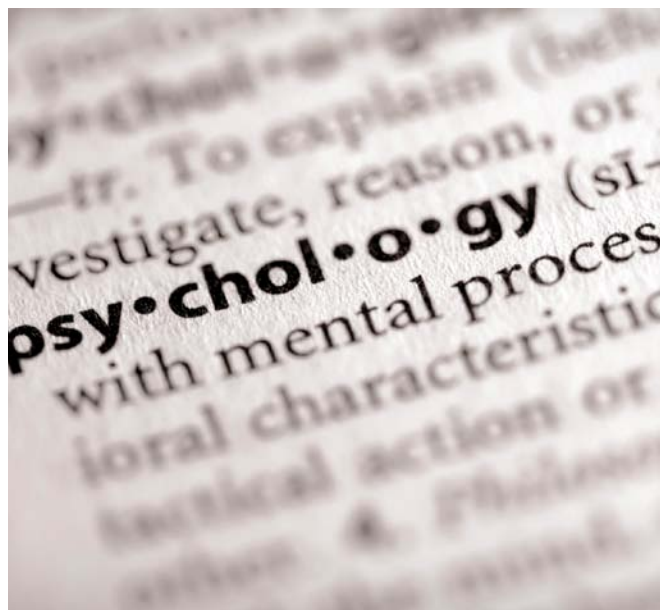
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## *This document is a guide to understanding the role, function and needs of School Psychologists in Western Australia and the benefits they can provide to the school environment.*

The delivery of education in Western Australia is undergoing significant changes at both State and national levels. Initiatives such as the creation of Independent Public Schools (IPS), increasing flexibility at the local school level, and school based operational management of School Psychologists make it more important than ever that school administrators understand the unique and critical role of School Psychologists in providing the best possible outcomes for students. The development of this document has involved extensive consultation with both government and non-government psychology services.

### **Why School Psychologists?**

A significant proportion of school-aged children and young people experience social, emotional, behavioural and mental health issues. These issues are likely to have a detrimental impact on a child's learning and behaviour, and are of direct concern to schools. An increase in reported mental health issues in children and youth, and lack of access to external support services, means that psychological intervention and support for children and adolescents



within schools is essential. Usually, School Psychologists are also qualified teachers, which make them uniquely placed to both understand and work within schools and educational frameworks.

### **Role of the School Psychologist**

School Psychologists apply their psychological and educational expertise to support students to achieve academic success, psychological health, and social and emotional well-being. This is achieved through the delivery of preventative and point of need services directly to students, parents and teachers, and through consultative processes and program delivery for school and district systems.

MODEL FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICE IN SCHOOLS		
Who is involved?	Type of intervention	Level of intervention
Entire school community	Create environments to provide positive wellbeing	Develop school wide systems, data and practices
All students and teachers all parents and carers	Education on social and emotional skills	Embed in practice and curriculum
Students with signs of behaviour, learning, or mental health support needs	Teaching and learning adjustments targeted group/class	Additional strategies, consultation and support
Students with behaviour, learning, and/or mental health support needs	Assessment and planning	Individual assessment, interventions and documented plans
Students with high level support needs	Interagency case management	Intensive support and referral

**To achieve these outcomes, School Psychologists engage in a variety of activities including:**

- Collaborative development, implementation and evaluation of behaviour, social emotional and learning intervention plans
- Psychological and educational assessments
- Assisting in the management of critical incidents and risk assessments
- Assisting in the selection, design, implementation and evaluation of prevention programs
- Consulting with key stakeholders including teachers, parents and school administrators
- Counselling
- Referral to external agencies
- Providing information and psychological education to student populations, school staff, parents/guardians and external stakeholders



## **School Psychologist Qualifications**

In order to practise, psychologists must be registered with the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA). Registration involves at least six years training and supervision. At a minimum, psychologists must complete a four-year degree in psychology and undertake a two year internship as a provisional psychologist prior to becoming a registered psychologist. Most School Psychologists possess a recognised teaching qualification and some psychologists working in Western Australian schools have completed higher degrees at masters and doctoral levels.

**School Psychologists have expertise in the following areas:**

- Identifying and assessing mental health issues and providing follow up support or referral to other mental health services
- Conducting assessments in learning, social, emotional and behavioural domains and communicating assessment results to key people, such as parents and teachers and relevant professionals
- Providing expert advice and direct intervention in the management of critical incidents
- Assisting in the design and evaluation of effective prevention, intervention and support programs for individuals, groups and school populations
- Providing counselling and intervention for a range of issues affecting children and adolescents
- Providing Professional Learning for staff on a range of topics, and conducting workshops for parents and small group interventions for students
- Consulting with parents, teachers, school administrators, external agencies and other members of the school community in regard to interventions, services and support for students
- Understanding and conducting research in areas relating to school psychology practice

**School Psychologists have psychological and educational knowledge in:**

- Child development, including the biological, cognitive, perceptual, social and emotional aspects of behaviour and learning
- How learning and behaviour are influenced by the school environment and by students' development, experiences, abilities, interests, language, family, culture and community
- Effective individual, group-based and whole-school prevention and intervention programs
- The social dynamics of groups and organisations
- Change management principles as applied to individuals, groups, organisations and systems

- The purpose, nature and use of a variety of assessment strategies to inform teaching, learning and behaviour programs
- Legislation, policies and procedures that define the parameters of educational programs and psychological practice

UNIQUE COMBINATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS	
Work in the areas of –	School Psychologists
Behaviour assessment and planning	✓
Learning and cognitive assessments	✓
Mental health assessment and support	✓
Linking complex student issues to educational outcomes	✓

## Negotiating Psychological Services in your School

In order to establish effective psychological services in schools, collaboration between the principal and the school psychologist regarding school priorities and service delivery needs is essential. Effective psychological support ranges from consultation to intensive support and this range of services can be directed towards whole school and preventative approaches through to a focus on individual intervention. (see diagram below – *Model for Effective Practice in Schools*).

Negotiating psychological services for your school is a dynamic process that takes into consideration local contextual factors, other professional supports available, student outcome and behaviour data and the professional and ethical obligations of psychologists as outlined in this document.

## What are the Ethical Obligations of School Psychologists?

In order to maintain their registration, psychologists must adhere to the standards and guidelines of the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA) and the ethical codes developed by the PBA and the Australian Psychological Society (APS). Ethical obligations that are particularly relevant to psychologists working in schools include:

**Informed consent** – Prior to providing services, School Psychologists are required to inform clients about the nature, purpose and potential consequences of the interaction, the limits to confidentiality and right of access to files. In the case of children, informed consent is obtained from a parent or legal guardian. However, at a certain point, a young person can be judged to be able to independently seek psychological support and, therefore, provide informed consent in his or her own right. It is the responsibility of the School Psychologist to determine whether a young person possesses the ability to give informed consent for psychological services.

**Confidentiality** – School Psychologists are bound by law to maintain client confidentiality when collecting, recording, storing, disseminating, and disposing of information. However, a School Psychologist cannot keep confidential any information that reveals a risk of harm to the client or to any other person. Similarly, information that is requested under a court order must also be disclosed.



## What do School Psychologists require in order to provide effective support to schools?

**Effective referral processes** – Typically, the school will have a nominated case manager who will discuss potential referrals with the School Psychologist. A case conference may be held to confirm referral, obtain further information regarding the referral concern, gain shared understandings and to develop collaborative action plans. The School Psychologist will discuss interventions, ethical obligations and obtain informed parental consent when required.





**Adequate record keeping and file storage facilities** – School Psychologists must protect the privacy and maintain the confidentiality of client files in relation to access, storage and disposal. The School Psychologist's files must be stored separately from all other school or multidisciplinary team files and must be kept in a secure, locked cabinet in a locked room – usually the School Psychologist's office.

**Access to professional supervision** – Regular professional supervision and peer consultation form a necessary part of maintaining registration as a psychologist and ensuring the competent delivery of psychological services in schools.

**Quality professional development** – To maintain registration with the PBA, psychologists are required to engage in a minimum of 30 hours of continuing professional development each year, of which 10 hours must be peer consultation. This is required whether they work full time or part time. This allows them to maintain their expertise, and keep up to date on new psychological research and legislation and further develop their professional skills and knowledge.

**Provision of resources** – The organisation or school employing the School Psychologist is responsible for providing appropriate and adequate resources, including the following:

- Access to all current psychological and educational testing materials required to fulfil the professional role as defined in the job description
- An annual budgetary allowance for accessing continuing professional development, supervision and professional resources (i.e. books, journal subscriptions and psychological tools)
- Access to telecommunication and computing systems, lockable filing cabinets, stationery and office furniture, such as a bookcase, table for assessments, coffee table, and whiteboard
- A private location from which to provide professional services to school populations, with a private area for students who are waiting for their appointments. The room should be accessible by those who have disabilities and provide adequate privacy, comfort and suitability for group and individual counselling, assessment and consultation. It should be a permanent location within a school. Ideally, this room is arranged in such a way as to maximise the safety of the School Psychologist. Some additional safety precautions could include two exits and an emergency alarm
- Administrative processes that enable timely approval of requests for leave and professional development
- Adequate provision for travel to, and from, other destinations if required

For further information contact the School Psychologists' Association of Western Australia through our website:

**[www.schoolpsychologistwa.org](http://www.schoolpsychologistwa.org)**

## **Reference documents**

### *Code of Ethics*

Australian Psychological Society (2007)

### *Competency Framework for School Psychologists*

Department of Education (in press)

### *Framework for the Effective Delivery of School Psychological Services*

Australian Psychological Society (2009)

### *Guidelines for Working with Young People*

Australian Psychological Society (2009)

### *Guidelines on Psychology continuing professional development*

Psychology Board of Australia (2010)

### *Mental Health Programmes in Schools*

World Health Organisation (1994)

### *Psychology Guidelines for 4+2 internship program provisional psychologists and supervisors*

Psychology Board of Australia (2010)

